

Y'know, for kids!
Social software for children

Fiona Romeo
foe@foeromeo.org

O'Reilly Emerging Technology Conference

How can we ensure
children's safety
while letting them have
expressive identities
in social software?

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MSN shuts down its chatrooms

Microsoft's internet service MSN is to cut back drastically its chatroom services because of concerns about child safety, it said.

MSN is closing all its chatrooms in Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and most of Asia from 14 October, and changing the way others are operated globally.



One in five children regularly use chatrooms, reports suggest

"As a responsible leader we feel it necessary to make these changes because online chat services are increasingly being misused," it said.

Children's charities welcomed the move as "momentous" and said they saw it as a big step towards protecting young web users, but some have criticised the decision.

Abusive contact

Internet service provider Lycos has branded the action as "irresponsible" and fears children will move to other

WATCH AND LISTEN

Alex Kovach, Lycos UK

"We don't think this is a sensible move"

[▶ VIDEO](#)

VOTE RESULTS

Should chatrooms be closed down?

Yes 23%**No** 77%**744 Votes Cast**

Results are indicative and may not reflect public opinion

BBC NEWSROUND



Chat fears

Will children be put off using chatrooms or stay talking online?

SEE ALSO:

[▶ Chatroom closure under fire](#)

Fears about child safety online

In September last year **MSN closed its chatrooms** in the UK and Europe, citing concerns about child safety. And just last month, the mobile operators in the UK released a code of practice that effectively **bars under-18s from un-moderated chat**

There has been something of a moral panic in the UK around child safety on the internet - particularly chatrooms (or what are increasingly known as 'contact services')

View from the headlines:

- 'Are any of our children safe on the net?'
- 'A playground for paedophiles'
- 'Neglect your children and you'll find them in the chatroom'
- 'Closing down chatrooms will protect our children'

Social context



Child care increasingly **privatised**

- Even though children most dependent on social capital and informal networks of gift and exchange

Families becoming more **risk averse**

- Intensive adult supervision
 - Parents unsure how to manage risk in shared settings, e.g. school trips
 - Reduces the scope for self-directed time, imagination and exploration
 - Increased risks for children who break away from parental controls
-
- Children playing freely in **public space** less common
 - Far fewer children walk to school
 - Children argue that they'd enjoy themselves more in playgrounds if the equipment were more challenging
 - Growth in scope and influence of private consumption. 'Private' toys - e.g. *PlayStation* - used at home, often in the bedroom

Introducing our personas...

Persona	Demographic	Defining moments	Identity work
 'Jessica'	<i>Pre-teen girls</i> 8-11 years	School Owning things Copying older girls	Not self-conscious
 'Jake'	<i>Teenage boys</i> 13-15 years	Secondary school Puberty Finding acceptance	Extremely self-conscious

Personas are archetypal users

- People are individuals who can differ enormously according to **personality traits** (e.g. extrovert versus introvert, level of maturity) and **personal situation** (e.g. financial status)
- Whether young or old, identity is something that **changes and develops** over time and according to different situations
- For kids and teens, identity is **still being formed** and so is continually evolving as they begin to assert themselves

Identity management (registration)

Identity management



Jessica's **not self-conscious enough** to worry about secrecy or managing different identities

Where she does talk about her identity in different contexts, it's in terms of **mood**

- How she *feels* in different contexts
- Not how she's *seen* in different contexts

“If I was at home I'd be bored, whereas if I was at a party I'd be really happy”

The different contexts are also set out more clearly for her

- Governed by school and parents

Identity management



Jake **lacks the space** to be different at different times

- Roles assigned to him by his peer groups
- Real fear of being embarrassed and summed up for good:
“He’s a nutter, he’s thick, he’s good at sport, he’s a lady’s man”
- Constant pressure to present himself in the best possible light in all contexts

Secretive and non-committal in unfamiliar situations

- Only reveals different aspects of his identity to a close few

Sometimes it’s important to **save face**

- Wouldn’t participate in a discussion about school work, unless he could do so anonymously

What data would children share?

PERSONAL INFORMATION	UK	EUROPE
My address	9.70%	14.70%
My phone number	9.50%	12.60%
My e-mail address	22.50%	36.00%
My full name	24.00%	34.50%
My real age	27.90%	44.00%
My school's name	16.30%	24.80%
None of the above	0.00%	2.70%

R3DRUM: yeah course

mnika: hao are ju

mnika: hallo

hip.hop.chik.: add me ash [redacted]@hotmail.com



Say

Text input field for chat



Contact details

- The piece of personal information that most kids would share with others is their **email address**
- Recent research by MSN UK found that teens don't consider their Microsoft Passport ID to be personal information
- There has been an abundance of safety education in the UK (and Europe), so **children now have some concerns** about security but their concerns tend to be for other, younger users NOT themselves (but might be a mask for concerns about themselves)
- Boys are more likely than girls to give out their contact details

Mixed messages

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying 'om/private/wizardprofile.aspx?newwizard=1' and a search bar with 'xanga'. The page title is 'Xanga Setup Wizard'. The main content area is divided into two sections: 'Basic Profile Info' and 'Instant Messenger'. The 'Basic Profile Info' section contains fields for First Name, Last Name, Country, State or Province, Zip Code, Birthday, Gender, Email, and Website. Each field has a 'show' or 'hide' radio button next to it. The 'Instant Messenger' section contains fields for AIM, MSN, ICQ, and Yahoo, each with a 'show' or 'hide' radio button next to it.

Xanga Setup Wizard

om/private/wizardprofile.aspx?newwizard=1

Q xanga

Amazon Post Me

Basic Profile Info

First Name: ☐ show ☒ hide

Last Name: ☐ show ☒ hide

Country: ☐ show ☒ hide

State or Province: other: ☐ show ☒ hide

Zip Code: (U.S. & Canada) • [find Xangans near you - soon!](#) ☐ not shown (?)

Birthday: ☐ show ☒ hide

Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ show ☒ hide

Email: ☐ show ☒ hide

Website: ☐ show ☒ hide

Instant Messenger

AIM: ☐ show ☒ hide

MSN: ☐ show ☒ hide

ICQ: ☐ show ☒ hide

Yahoo: ☐ show ☒ hide

- Screenshot from a journalling site. 'Basic' info requested includes contact details, full name and zip code
- Restricted to over-11s (COPPA) but children most at risk from 'contact' 12-14 years
- At least this only asks for your own personal data; social network sites ask for your friends' as well
- Can undermine safety education messages

Safety education

BBC i

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CHATGUIDE

WELCOME

...to teens, kids, parents and teachers.

The ChatGuide website is full of information, tips and hints, and helpful Internet links to keep you safe while you have fun chatting on line.

First, be 'chat savvy' by checking out these five golden rules...



ChatGuide Today

Monday
Meera says
"Remember 'Stranger Danger' - people may not be who they say they are in 'real life'"



STAY CHAT SAVVY

- 1 Be wary - people may not be who they say they are
- 2 Don't give out personal info.
- 3 Don't put your friends in a sticky situation by posting their details
- 4 Be cautious about meeting online people face to face
- 5 You are in control - let someone know if you feel uncomfortable online

Teacher's Pack

Take a look at our new section for teachers. There are three lesson packs for you to use.

Whether you have a fast or slow Internet connection, there's something for you here.

Want to know more?



PARENT'S GUIDE

All the facts on 'chat' plus how to keep your children safe online. Why not try chat for yourself & meet other parents?



TEEN'S GUIDE

How to practise safe chat. Links to gr8 sites. The latest band and celeb chat from BBCi.



CBBC SAFE SURFING

Get 'chat savvy' and play Dongle's safe surfing game and quiz. Download Dongle's amazing musical screensaver and some wallpaper for your own PC.



TEACHER'S GUIDE

NEW SECTION! Meera Syal presents a lesson on video, and there's also a version on PowerPoint for you to use too.

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Personal information meets journals

- Journals combine the collection and display of contact details with **intense personal disclosure**
- Online grooming practices - predatory adults target socially isolated children and teens
- LiveJournal has a good tool for managing privacy (public and 'friends' setting for posts) but this is probably not very effective given children's casual approach to identity management
- Journals are very popular with - and valuable to - young people, so we need to look at ways to encourage (not just facilitate) privacy. At the very least, journals should be separated from personally identifiable data and have privacy- and safety-friendly defaults

Ambhykins

Nyā Yuri [\[userinfo \]](#)[\[livejournal userinfo \]](#)
[\[calendar \]](#)[\[livejournal calendar \]](#)

Steph is One Cool Chicka

[\[11 Jan 2004|07:22am\]](#)[\[mood \]](#)  bored [\[\]](#)[\[music \]](#) "Timberwolves at New Jeresey"- Taking Back Sunday**What Inuyasha Character are you? - Results**

Your Inuyasha! You are a punk, you like to pick fights and hate being in school, your grades are slipping but you don't care, you are having to much fun to actually do anything about it!

Put this code into your web page to show off your result to other:

```
<br>Your Inuyasha! You  
are a punk, you like to pick<br>fights
```

liked for sooooo long! I'm so sorry I kept you ways amazed by how smart that girl is and think I choked on my water at least five quite a lot of subjects, definately a saving for the memories. Except that fucking , why? Well you all should go to it, because exposed to it, it's engraved in my memory when I want to get my lazy ass up to eat

interesting HIV fighting tactics and I'm would really work. It's an interesting article, the morning.. so I could find anything Well that's about it, I don't have anything t.

Today's Goals:

A few GED Pretests

Steph's Drawing

Essay #1 of my Project

Beg mother into letting me stay home tomorrow.

Meh, I'm bored, but on the bright side of things, I'm not tired for once!

[3 comments](#) [post comment](#)

BBC identity solution for kids

- Introducing the concepts of **personal information** and **privacy** in context, and setting standards that our younger users will hopefully take elsewhere
- Balancing ease of use with security, e.g. in recognition of **shared use** of computers there is no 'remember me' option
- Policing the **public/private divide** - don't collect or publish contact information and no data is automatically made public. Parental consent required for collection of personal details
- Minute questions of language - 'secret question secret answer' (password retrieval) functionality renamed 'private question private answer', to privilege personal privacy over 'secrets'
- Now researching the feasibility and desirability of age verification

Start  Finish

Important! Always remember these

Do ✓


- **Do tell your parent or guardian** that you are now a BBKi member
- **Do respect each other**
- **Do have fun**

Don't ✗

- To keep safe - **don't tell anyone** your real
 - name
 - address
 - phone number
 - school
 - password
 - secret answers
- **Don't be rude!**

Cancel

I promise

Next 



Role-playing



Her shows
that I support
Mar. and



Cigarettes



I like to
have a little
drink.



PHONE



Role-playing



Aspires to older, teenage life

- Looking forward to becoming a teenager or even a mini-adult
- Looking for opportunities to **try out older roles**, rehearse a teenage script

Busy mirroring the behaviour of her mum and older sisters

- Physical **appearance** is particularly important (e.g. make up, shopping, clothes...)
- She's not self conscious about it, though - make up is something fun to try on, not yet a way of presenting herself for approval or acceptance

Role-playing



Manifests in a need to **be better**, like the older boys

- Making people laugh, being good at sport, getting high scores in computer games...
- Becoming quite **competitive**

Can also be very **escapist**

- Acts out fantasies via computer games or in virtual worlds to escape the pressures and insecurities of the real world and build his ideal self

Sometimes it's important to **save face**

- Wouldn't participate in a discussion about school work, unless he could do so anonymously

Identity play online

Player Name	Age	Gender	Location	Score	Rank	Team	Score	Rank
Hot minx ina thong	14	F	England, United Kingdom	100	1	CT	100	1
hot nat 2003	13	F	England, United Kingdom	100	2	CT	100	2
HoT PaRtY GiRl 03	16	F	England, United Kingdom	100	3	CT	100	3
Hot Sax Player		F	United Kingdom	100	4	CT	100	4
hot sexy villababe	13	F	England,	100	5	CT	100	5
hot sugargem2002uk	15	F	England,	100	6	CT	100	6
Hot Susy4	21	F	United Kingdom	100	7	CT	100	7
hot tub tastic	15	F	England,	100	8	CT	100	8
Hot UK GuY 86	16	M	England,	100	9	CT	100	9
HoT×HeLz		F	England,	100	10	CT	100	10
hot2hold hot2handle	16	F	England,	100	11	CT	100	11
hotalex2	17	M	England,	100	12	CT	100	12
Hot-And-Crazy-In-Love	14	M	England,	100	13	CT	100	13
hotangel nomi	16	F	Northern Kingdom	100	14	CT	100	14
hotasianchick2		F	England, United Kingdom	100	15	CT	100	15
Hotbabe 4u10		F	England, United Kingdom	100	16	CT	100	16

Teams	Frag	Deaths	Ping
CT (9 players)	WINS = 7		148
[HBO]sac[Sgt.Mr.]	18	2	194
[HBO]Cyborg[Sgt.Mr.]	DEAD 16	5	43
[HBO]BARTENDER[Mr.]	DEAD 13	4	43
[HBO]Mormag	DEAD 9	7	194
[HBO]Dread[Sgt.Mr.]	DEAD 8	6	231
[HBO]Confused[Sgt.]	DEAD 6	5	220
xTAG-Curryman	DEAD 4	6	199
DILDO	DEAD 1	10	44
Joey Deacon	DEAD 0	0	171
TERRORIST (9 players)	WINS = 2		194
UsaOfFinland	DEAD 11	9	90
Mr.Rizla	7	7	229
Wolfman700	DEAD 5	10	167
[HBO]SLUZ BUCKET	DEAD 4	8	223
[PEF]xateng	DEAD 3	2	210
Left	DEAD 3	3	195
=Jad=[BITE_M3	DEAD 2	6	178
Grby-Tex	2	9	302
Lala	DEAD 1	9	150

Self expression (public profiles)



Likes and dislikes



Cheese.... I love it.



Brussels sprouts The worst vegetable in the world.



My favourite books
(the films are great too.)



I don't think I'll give you my phone.

or my PC.



I love my Mum and Dad.



I love my dog, a little, but I love her...!



I Am pretty fond of films.



a great actor, one of my favourites.





Likes and dislikes



Identity defined in straightforward terms of their **interests**

- Keen to describe what they're into, e.g. ballet, sport, animals, TV characters, their 'things'
- Rarely focused on abstract personality traits

Expressed as **likes and dislikes**

- What they dislike is as important as what they like

"I'm into Spurs... but not spiders"

Interests bring **inclusion**

"You have to make sure you're into things that other people are into, cos otherwise you've got no one to talk to."



More specifically...



Can often find belonging in apparently **minor dividers**

“You have Mary-Kate and Ashley girls like me and then others who are into Rimmel”

For Jake, interests come with **strong hierarchies**

- Not only that he’s into something but that he’s *more* into it and into it in a *cooler* way

Social groups tend to be **single-sex**

- Gender differences relatively pronounced, and so their interests are very gender-specific



Visual representation



Visual representation



Pulling faces

- Mood rather than appearance
- Would change regularly

Wearing favourite colours



Unwilling to choose one image

- Fear of being labelled ('for good')

Socially-acceptable choices

- E.g. cars they're into, products they own, labels
- Images where he's looking good

Best practice: LEGO and Neopets

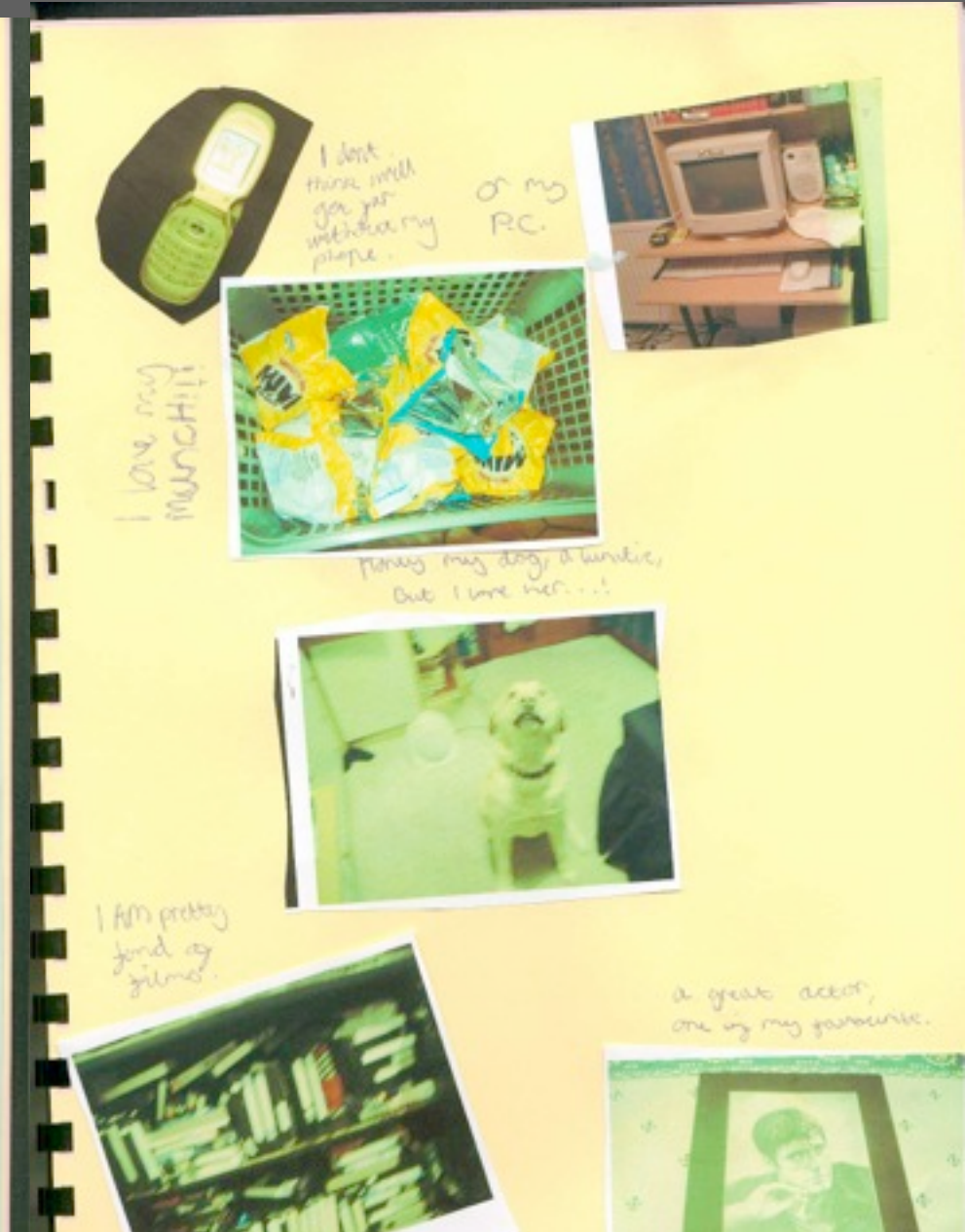
Working from an understanding of how younger users want to express their identity, you find that the demographic data that services are so keen to collect isn't really necessary. It's possible to create safe, yet expressive, public profiles.



Friendship and groups

(buddy lists)

Peer expectations



Peer expectations



Jake's beginning to understand that **social symbols** have meaning

- E.g. which school you go to, what brand of trainers you wear...
- A simple badge can be enough for him to judge whether someone is worth talking to

Image is all important


- Starting to worry about appearance, bodily development
- Beginning to groom, trying to look good

“The photo of my Clearasil, my hair gel and deodorant sums me up the best”

Looking for ways to be who he *thinks* he *should* be

- But has to be finely balanced to accommodate the different aspects of his life - his peers, school and family

Group membership

Persona	Purpose	Benefits	Pressures
 <p>'Jessica'</p>	<p>Belonging and popularity</p> <p>Needs to be liked; the more friends and groups the better</p>	<p>Involvement; not conscious of effect on her identity</p> <p>It's all about being involved</p>	<p>Lie about having an interest to be included</p>
 <p>'Jake'</p>	<p>Belonging but also differentiation</p> <p>Can define different groups easily; needs to badge himself</p>	<p>Reassurance; looks to group to take or bolster his own identity</p> <p>Eases his fear of exposure</p>	<p>Hide anything that might exclude him, e.g. religion</p> <p>Lie about acceptance things, e.g. PS2</p>

Popularity

Popularity score: 0. This is the number of members who have you on their lists.

Popularity ranking: 7016362 (percentile: 13.349)

0 people are more popular, 0 are less popular, 0 are equal

BuddyRank

BuddyRank score: 1.00

BuddyRank ranking: 45912

BuddyRank is a measure of a person's importance, computed in the same manner that Google computes PageRank. BuddyRank is only computed for members who have submitted their BuddyRank.

See another screenname's popularity

Enter screenname:

Add your popularity ranking to your AIM profile

Simply paste in the text below:

```
<a href="http://buddyzoo.com/quickpop?s=foeromeo"
target="_SELF">View my BuddyZoo popularity</a>
```



Friendship and common sense

Social network sites, and IM add-ons like IMchaos and BuddyZoo, play to less desirable behaviours among children - **popularity contests** and **cliques**. They also dangerously collapse the common sense notions of friendship that children already have:

- Several studies have shown that after initial experimentation with chat, teens move to IM; they have no real interest in talking to strangers
- Teens might have buddy lists of 100-200 people but their contacts are all either friends (people they've met irl) or friends of friends. They don't take it any further than that.

Social network sites encourage exploration of more distant connections and the collecting of friends. Orkut and Friendster are over-18 but Tribe doesn't seem to have an age restriction. Social network sites have already started to be critiqued from a privacy perspective; let's extend that to consider safety as well.

Best practice: Toontown



Best practice: Toontown

A more responsible conceptualisation of what it means to have a friend in social software is used by Toontown, which offers two ways to communicate with other players:

- **Speedchat** is a menu-based chat system that allows a player to say everything they need to say to be able to play the game, without communicating any personal information
- The **Secret Friends** system allows players to exchange a secret code outside of the game that will allow two friends to chat with each other inside the game
- Their approach to easy group forming would also alleviate some concerns Jake and Jessica have around joining groups



Barriers to joining groups



Nervous about joining existing groups

- Feeling of being in a weaker position
- Having to conform to established rules

But starting your own is also difficult; you don't know if anyone will join

Prefer the *feeling* that they are joining or beginning a group **alongside other people** - especially their friends

And that goes double online

- Friends' behaviour as limits of Jessica's world
- What's the point for Jake? ***“But I can speak to my friends...”***
 - Perceived to be lacking in credibility; ‘bullshitting’
 - Knowing he'd lie & disrupt means he worries about others

Designing for safety

Some guidelines

Do's

- Be clear about your **target audience and moderation** model. (And give careful thought to **pre-moderation**.)
- Get **parental consent**
- Focus on **interests and mood**, rather than demographic info
- Use **child-friendly language**
- Have **safe (private!) defaults**
- Give children **control over the public display** of their data (and caution them)
- Include **contextual safety messages**
- Build in **safety tools** like 'ignore' and 'alert'

Don'ts

- **Collect more data** than is required
- Encourage (or even allow) children & teens to post their **contact details**
- **Automatically transfer** information to public profiles or directories (FOAF is a very questionable idea for children)
- Allow users to search directories by age and gender
- **Publish friend lists** - or totals - by default (and don't call them 'friends'!)
- Encourage users to **post pictures of themselves**

Implications for
blogs and wikis:
WikiWorm



Wednesday afternoon

February 11th 2004

22 new things!



What's this?

A magpie feather

Who found it?

FoeRomeo Age 14

Where was it found?

Ogmore, Wales, UK

Do you like it?

I like it!**I don't!**» **Comment [6 so far]**» **Add your own picture****New things!****Lego**MikeyB
Boise, Idaho**Fossil**JavierQ
Santiago, Chile**Stamps**HollyV
Melbourne, Australia

...and another 19 new things

How to collect things

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, **consectetur** adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut **labore** et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo **consequat**. Duis aute

What is WikiWorm about? [Parents click here...](#)

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut

WikiWorm

WikiWorm is a website (made up of wiki and weblog elements) that allows children to express their identity through the **things they collect** rather than their personally-identifiable information. The 'things' they like and dislike - and the ownership of things - is very important identity work for children.

"Collecting things sort of shows what the person's like. It gives an insight on the person."

"Collecting is to impress mates. They can collect things to impress you, and you can collect things to impress them."

- **Picture-based** - Jessica is especially interested in visuals
- **Mobile** - can feel connected and contribute from wherever
- **Structured** entry forms, with pull-downs - lack of typing skills can be a problem

22 new things!

CollectingGuide

How to collect

There is no limit to what has been, or might be collected. Some collections are made up of everyday things that are easily available, such as football programmes or badges. Others are determined by a particular feature for example, **MiniatureToys**, military items or artefacts from a particular location.

Different things are amassed in different ways. Some collectors buy things at auctions, antique shops, **JunkShops** or even car boot sales. Others might **JoinClubs** and **SwapItems**. Archaeologists dig things up and some of them are displayed in museums. Some items cannot be collected in the normal way. Church brasses are collected by taking an impression of the surface with a rubbing; memories, stories or accents have to be collected on tape; changes to buildings or the landscape are collected on film.

Collecting is a very enjoyable, but often private activity. Many collectors want to share their collections with others, and at some point, might think about setting up a museum of their own, or giving the collection to a museum. But museums are more than collections of collections; they ensure that things are

You can:

+ Add to this page

» [See more pages like this](#)

Say whether you like it or not

I like it!

I don't!

WikiWords:

WikiWords are the words with GreenBehind them that link to the different pages on WikiWorm, just like the links everywhere else on TheInternet. But, unlike everywhere else, **you** can make them. WikiWords are magic words that make pages on WikiWorm - you can try it yourself at our ScribblePage.

Collaborative, anonymous editing of a guide to collecting - with *just enough* ID

- Pre-populated. There's nothing more off-putting than a blank page but children are very comfortable re-purposing
- Wikis can be problematic for unconfident typists like Jessica, so it's important that the guide is in the context of a highly visual service and that it's easy to add and reposition pictures (drag and drop)
- Because wiki pages are anonymous, there's less motivation to contribute, so there has to be some identity pay off:
 - Nickname **appears on pages** they make or add to
 - Each contributor has a **profile listing pages** they've made or added to, and the date and time of their last contribution
 - All users are able to easily say whether they **like or dislike** a thing or page



Go

»



F1154A-H

» Add your own picture



PokemonRed

Moderation by parents

Using **RSS syndication** to hand moderation over to parents

- A mix of **reactive** and **distributed moderation**
- Using a subset of users - parents - as moderators
- Parents alerted to children's posts or any edits to their child's pages on a wiki
- If something inappropriate is happening, they can either take it up with their child, or refer it to the site for attention
- Reduces moderation costs
- Actively involves parents in both their child's activities and setting standards of behaviour for the service itself
- Need not be a negative for the child: 'fridge door', rather than 'checking pockets'

Questions?
(Comments also welcome)

<http://foe.typepad.com>